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***Kids, Families, and Volunteers Gather at Hoke Community Forest to Restore
Longleaf Pine and Learn the Nuts and Bolts of Conservation***

Hoke Community Forest, Raeford, NC –

It was a bright and hopeful marker of the future when at least 100 people --- children, families, and leaders of Hoke County --- gathered Saturday at the Hoke Community Forest (HCF) to celebrate the restoration of longleaf pine and renewal of civic stewardship on this small but important patch of public woodland. As Hoke County grows, so do its efforts to provide access to natural resources for its citizens, and that work is on prominent display at the HCF.

The event opened with welcoming remarks from Hoke County Manager Letitia Edens, Commissioner James Leach, Sam Cook of NCSU, and Jesse Wimberley of North Carolina's Sandhills Prescribed Burn Association (SPBA). The county provided enthusiastic support for the event and leaders directly engaged with county citizens and interested stakeholders of all ages.

Almost 40 local youngsters eager to 'learn by doing' planted hundreds of vibrant longleaf pine seedlings (and many pounds of native plant seeds) in a special area where the forest's productive soils border an increasingly busy Vass Road. While some kids planted trees under the watchful eye of adult volunteers like David Auman, ranger from Camp Mu-Sha-Ni, others rotated through tented learning stations where seasoned natural resource professionals from shared knowledge about growing and managing trees, identifying animals, caring for soil and water, using forestry tools, and the joys of forest exploration. Kids took turns helping senior forester Rob Drummond, of Milliken Advisors, extract core samples from nearby loblolly pines to understand how trees age over time. After an hour or two of conservation work and education, people of all ages raced to the Hotdog King food truck for a well-earned break and lunch.

Teachers and leaders from across the region who generously volunteered their weekend time were proudly represented by the following organizations: The Longleaf Alliance, US Forest Service, US Natural Resources Conservation Service, North Carolina Forest Service, Enviva, Milliken Advisors, The Nature Conservancy, Great Woods Companies, National Wildlife Federation, NC State University, Lumbee Tribe of NC, Girl Scouts/Camp Mu-Sha-Ni, US Fish & Wildlife Service, Hoke County, and Sandhills Prescribed Burning Association.